

# **White House Conference on Aging Listening Session**

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AAAS

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## **Building Support for a Robust Research Agenda for Healthy Aging**

My name is Karen Goraleski and I am the Director of Research!America's Prevention Research Initiative. Research!America is a not-for-profit, membership-supported public education and advocacy alliance. Our nearly 500 member institutions, organizations and corporations represent the voices of more than 100 million Americans who want medical and health research—including research to prevent disease, disability and injury and to promote health—to be a much higher national priority.

I want to thank the Committee for engaging this much needed conversation. Let me also add my sincere appreciation to the Alliance for Aging Research and the American Federation for Aging Research for inviting Research!America to bring the voice of Americans to this listening session.

I will focus my remarks on the American public's expectations of medical and health research. This includes research to prevent disease, disability and injury and to promote health. Public opinion polls conducted by the media, foundations and political parties demonstrate that health is at or near the top

of the issues Americans care about. But pollsters rarely ask about research that makes better health possible. Research!America does ask and has been doing so for the last dozen years. We listen when Americans talk about research and it is clear that health research is a winning issue with the public.

What are Americans attitudes towards research?

- Americans have an appetite for more information on health research than ever before; in fact, a majority of Americans are hungry to see *more* information about medical research in newspapers, magazines or on television; (See accompanying PowerPoint slides for each of these poll results.)
- They support aging research and 9 in 10 believe that the federal government should increase funding for aging research;
- An overwhelming majority of Americans believe that medical and health research is important to the U.S. economy;
- They largely believe it is important for the United States to maintain global leadership in medical and health research;
- Americans want a voice in how government research funds are spent;

- Currently 6 cents of every health care dollar is spent on medical and health research. Half of all Americans would like to see this increase to at least 7 cents per dollar. Less than one cent of this dollar is spent on prevention and public health research.
- Over half believe that preventable diseases and injuries are a major health problem;
- And nearly three-fourths of Americans want an increased investment in prevention and public health research;
- When asked where the focus of this (prevention and public health) research should be, the top three responses are cancer, even though it is not the number 1 killer, closely followed by heart disease and stroke and third, diabetes. What we see reflected here are three chronic diseases. These are the conditions that our aging population is living and struggling with every day.
- Lastly, we also know that the majority of Americans hold scientists in high regard and that Americans want research to succeed.

Given these comments and those of my colleagues, how does this inform our discussion today?

We know that our nation's research enterprise continues to deliver new clinically relevant knowledge,

preventive services, technologies and pharmaceuticals that carry with it the promise of significant contributions to improving the quality of life in our aging population.

One of the challenges we have before us is to figure out how will we meet the increasingly rising expectations for research? Let me frame this in a way that hits home with me. My mother is a member of this aging cohort that we are talking about. Long past the typical retirement age, she continues to work full time and runs her own business.

She is active, engaged, full of purpose and she has hopes. Four years ago her hope was realized when she shattered her femur. Research delivered on its promise of hope. She fully recovered thanks to the shiny steel pins in her leg and the rehabilitative services she received—all grounded in research.

And she is also impatient. She is expecting that research will rescue her from the macular degeneration that has taken away so much of her vision. She has hope. She wants to read her office paperwork without elaborate technological assistance. She wants to clearly see the faces of her family. She wants to fully enjoy the words and the colors on the Christmas cards from her great-grandchildren.

She IS expecting the research enterprise to deliver answers to her vision problems. Know that the 78 million baby boomers right behind her have VERY

high expectations that research will deliver quality and fullness of life in their active senior years. SHE is the leading edge of what is to come.

We cannot take for granted, especially given the economic challenges that confront our society, that our nation's current investment in research can continue to deliver the products necessary to support the needs of the new aging population, one that is growing in numbers and complexities.

We are not adequately prepared to solve the economic and administrative challenges associated with translating basic and clinical research into widely accessible preventive and medical interventions.

To conclude, in order to recruit the necessary support for working to solve the challenges I just noted, I ask that you as a Committee:

- Remember that research is an all-American priority;
- Reject any suggestion or hint that we should lower our expectations for what research can bring all Americans;
- Call for formulation of a clear set of research priorities to be consistently presented to those with the power to make sufficient funding allocation decisions;

- Inform the public about the human and economic benefits of research. Research saves lives and saves money;
- Work with the full spectrum of the research enterprise to celebrate the successes we achieve every day in these areas.

Thank you.

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